

MESSAGE VERSUS MESSENGER.

From "The Beacon," U.S.A.

Said the blue-crane to the sea-gull, as they conversed one day on the sands, "Why pride yourself so on your strength and your power of flight? Look at the grains of sand under our feet on this shore, on the thousands of shores in the world, at the sea-gulls in the air, and who, I beg of you, can distinguish one sea-gull from another?"

"Ah," replied the sea-gull, "with what a limited vision you see. I have a mission in life; I point to heaven in my flight, and when the poor earth-bound humans gaze up at me, circling in the blue, their thoughts rise to where their bodies cannot follow, and they dream to aspire to that which is not of the earth. Heavenward I carry their thoughts, their slowly, so slowly, moving thoughts, as I fly so straight and swiftly above them. No other gull in this whole world knows he is capable of carrying this message to humanity. Only when the careless, roving glance of a human being is caught and held by the beauty of my grace and the glint of the sun on my snowy wings, only when they see me, I tell you, crane, do their hearts lift upwards to the Highest. Is not that something to be proud of, crane, I ask you? I, only I, can do this thing.

"Look, there from the marshes come two of those poor humans, with those silly black sticks in their hands, that they love to use for the killing of our deluded cousins, the ducks. Watch me, crane—I will fly toward them, plunge straight down, and then circle up and up before them, and they will be so spell-bound at the beauty and grace of my flight that their hearts and souls will lift heavenward. Heavenward, and I, only I, can do this thing."

Scarcely could the crane hear the last words, so swiftly had the sea-gull flown away. Straight to a point above the two, the man and the girl, she soared. They lifted their heads and stopped to watch its approach. High she circled, then down, and up and down again. The man moved; there was a flash and a crash, and straighter and more swiftly than any flight for food or fun she had ever executed, the sea-gull plunged to the earth and lay motionless at the feet of the girl.

For the space of a sharply drawn breath the girl stood speechless, then

turning on the man, grey eyes filled with scorn and loathing, she cried in a voice that vibrated with the strength of her feeling: "That was not sport. It was a dead sure shot. The poor thing had no chance. It was a silly little boy trick."

"Dear," said the man, facing her scorn, and scarcely fighting down the laughter that it caused him, "I just wanted to show you that I could kill something; no harm is done. Gulls are as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore. One useless sea-gull out of so many will never be missed."

"I wonder," mused the blue crane aloud one day, as he rested on the sea-shore, "I wonder what has become of the sea-gull, the mighty sea-gull, the only one who had a message of light to carry to humanity; a message which only he, just he alone, out of so many sea-gulls, was destined to deliver. Perchance he is so busy circling in the air over men's heads and raising their thoughts to the Highest that he has no time to sport himself on our sunny, peaceful shore."

"I know," said the pelican, overhearing the crane's musings. "I know what befell him. I was resting in the reeds of the marsh, and I saw and heard it all. The man and the girl who go daily to the marshes to kill our cousins the ducks, were returning home by my side of the marsh, and as this sea-gull circled over their heads, raising their thoughts to the Highest, the man fired, and the sea-gull fell dead at the feet of the girl, and she was angry because it was a dead shot, and the man laughed, and the girl wept, and said, 'I love to watch the sea-gulls all over the world; they always seem so happy and carefree and safe; they make one think of what Heaven may perhaps be like. They lift my heart at times to things that are not of this earth,' and the man said, 'Dear, look—in our range of vision now are millions of sea-gulls still flying in the air to carry their message to your heart. How may one poor sea-gull more or less affect this message?'"

"It is ever thus," returned the blue crane, continuing her musings. "As soon as we think that we only I, only I, can carry this message to humanity, just so soon does our usefulness cease. It behoves us always to remember that it is the Message that is ever the important thing, and not the Messenger."

RYDER WYLDER.

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